

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

WILDLIFE FEATURE

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AVITROL SHOWS PROMISE AS IMPROVED MEANS OF CONTROLLING BLACKBIRDS

Scientists of the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service have for years been seeking an acceptable means of blackbird control, one that will protect food crops from depredations while at the same time preventing undue harm to the wildlife resource.

Scientific studies have been undertaken because the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 gave the Federal Government responsibility for protecting migratory bird species, but recognized that control activities would be necessary when nuisance situations, such as excessive food crop depredations, occurred.

Results of experiments indicate that Avitrol 200 (4-amino pyridine), tested in previous years by the Service and cleared recently for crop protection by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), can be used effectively. Although the chemical is toxic, its primary value lies in its ability to cause an erratic flying and calling behavior in birds that frightens away other members of the flock. Mortality, therefore, is reduced to a minimum.

Avitrol promises to be an improved control method over others tried previously against blackbirds. Explosive scaring devices are time consuming and difficult to maintain, shotgun patrols are

expensive, and toxicants, such as strychnine, are not selective in that they might kill nontarget species in appreciable numbers.

This summer's aerial application, planned for standing cornfields in Ohio, Michigan, North Dakota, South Dakota, and perhaps New York and Minnesota, will involve dropping a cracked corn mixture containing only one Avitrol-treated kernel to 99 untreated kernels. An average of about three applications will be made per season, depending upon the maturity of the crop.

The chemical has been field tested in many of these same States since 1964. About a dozen noncrop uses for Avitrol already are registered, and the substance has been tested against starlings and sea gulls at airports and against pigeons in urban areas.

If Avitrol works as expected this summer, frightening birds away from corn to weed seeds or waste grain elsewhere, farmers may be saved millions of dollars of damage and the Fish and Wildlife Service will have a useful method to fulfill its statutory obligations until better means of control are developed.

Scientists are optimistic that chemical repellents now under development will prove effective in blackbird control in the future.

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